The British Learning of Hindustani

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The British considered Hindustani, an urban language of north India, the *lingua franca* of the whole country. They associated it with (easy) Urdu and not modern, or Sanskritized, Hindi. They learned it to exercise power and, because of that, were not careful of mastering the polite usages of the language or its grammar. The British perceptions of the language spread it widely throughout India, especially the urban areas, making it much more widespread than it was when they had arrived. Moreover, their tilt towards Urdu associated it with the Muslims and the language was officially discarded in favour of Hindi in India after independence.

The literature of Anglo-India (used here in the earlier sense for the British in India and not for those born of marriages between Europeans and Indians as it came to be understood later) is full of words from Hindustani (also called Urdu by some authors). Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) can hardly be enjoyed unless one is provided with a glossary of these words and even then the authenticity of the experience of the *raj* is lost in the translation and the interpretation.

Many of those who had been in India used words of Hindustani as an identity marker. According to Ivor Lewis, author of a dictionary of Anglo-Indian words:

They [the Hindustani words] could not have been much used except (with fading relevance) among a declining number of
retired Anglo-Indians in the evening of their lives spent in their salubrious English compounds and cantonments. They brought with them into retirement their old imperial India colonized in their old imperial hearts, with a small but, to them, vivid vocabulary of Anglo-Indian words, such as I have quoted above, which set them apart from their stay-at-home neighbours (Lewis 1991: 11).

There are many examples of the use of Hindustani words in English speech from British writers even those, like Sir Walter Scott (The Surgeon’s Daughter, 1827), who had never been to India. Others who were acclaimed writers about India made it a distinctive feature of their portrayal of the British who had been to India or life in India. Some of the more well-known works in this genre, apart from Kipling, are by: William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63); E.M. Forster (1879-1970); William Knighton (1885); Edward Thomson (1886-1946) and Edmund Candler (1874-1926); Flora Annie Steel (1847-1927); Maud Diver (1867-1945); Alice Perrin (1867-1934) and Christine Weston (1904-19??) and many others. The present day hunger for nostalgic raj stories is fulfilled by P. M. Scott’s (1920-1978) [The] Raj Quartet (1966-1975), to name only the best sellers. All of them portray characters whose speech becomes colourful, authentic, or outlandish by the use of Hindustani words in it. It is as if one cannot create the distinctively exotic atmosphere of India if one does not use these Hindustani words.

However, Hindustani was not learned primarily to serve as an identity marker of past greatness, or evidence of having lived an exotic, adventurous and even a heroic life. It was learned as a tool of imperialism; quite literally as a language of command. The classic work on this is Bernard
Cohn’s influential article which argues that the British learned the vernacular languages, mostly Hindustani, to understand Indians better so as to rule them more efficiently. It was, more than any other language, ‘the language of command’ (Cohn 1985). It was the mark of the pukka sahib [the authentic master]. An Englishman, like Kipling’s Legal Member in the short story ‘Tod’s Amendment’, whose ‘knowledge of natives was limited to English-speaking durbaris, and his own red chaprassis’, knew no Hindustani and needed the boy Tod’s advice to make a popular law for the Indians (Kipling 1896: 185). It was also needed by the British women if only to order their servants and by the children in order to play with Indian children and get the attention of their servants. Moreover, it was all around them even in areas where it was not the local language because the British used it in the army and with their servants. Thus, even without formal instruction, it was picked up by the British.

Review of Literature and Objective

There are many accounts of the man who presided over the birth of modern Urdu prose, John B. Gilchrist (1759-1841) (Kidwai 1972; Siddiqi 1963-1979; Lelyveld 1993). Gilchrist arrived in India in 1782 and started learning Hindustani. In 1785 he took one year’s leave to collect material for a grammar and dictionary of this language. In 1786 the first, and in 1796 the second, parts of his dictionary were published. In the same year he published a grammar of Hindustani also. In 1799 he established a to teach Hindustani and Persian to junior civil servants in Calcutta and in 1800 he was appointed professor of Hindustani at Fort William College. At Fort William he commissioned Meer Amman Dehlvi (d. 1806?) (Akhtar 1992: 423-427) to write the prose tale Bagh-o-Bahar (1801) which was then used for teaching the language to several generations of British officers and Indians. There are also several accounts of the
Fort William College, often called the birthplace of both modern Urdu prose as well as Modern (Sanskritized) Hindi (Fort William 1801; Public 1811; Roebuck 1819). A very readable account, Sisir Kumar Das’s *Sahibs and Munshis* (Das 1978), remains the most accessible for the general reader. Less well known are accounts of the Haileybury College and the language-teaching either proposed or actually carried out there. T.R. Malthus proposed the establishment of a college for ‘some instruction in the rudiments of the oriental languages’ (Malthus 1817: 43) though the teaching was rudimentary at best. The names of some of the teachers of Urdu in this college and the military seminary at Addiscombe have, however, been given by Fisher (2004) in the context of tracing out the lives and occupations of Indians who settled in Britain before the twentieth century.

There are many accounts of the experience of learning Hindustani by the British in biographies and letters. A notable account, written by Rafiuddin Ahmed (1865-1954), a friend of Queen Victoria’s Hindustani teacher Munshi Abdul Karim and aspirant to the British parliament, is an indicator of the symbolic significance of the language in the mind of the Queen (Ahmad 1891). In a book sub-titled ‘language-learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India’, there is a brief account (4 pages) of the learning of Urdu by the British (Rahman 2002: 206-209). None of these accounts looks at the British perceptions of the language nor the different names—Moors, Hindustani (in variant spellings), Hindi, Hindvi, Rekhta, Urdu—of the language or its varieties. Nor do they describe the way the British officers learned the language nor their levels of proficiency or the relationship between their use of it and power. Some accounts do, however, describe some of the texts such as Meer Amman’s *Bagh-o-Bahar*, which was taught to the British officers at Fort William (Rahman 2002: 208). But this is a fairly advanced literary text. The basics of the language itself were taught through grammars, manuals
and phrase books which have not been described in any scholarly work in the detail they deserve. This article is an attempt to fill that gap.

This article, therefore, gives a more detailed account of the way the British learned what they mostly called ‘Hindustani’ than is available so far. It also relates the learning of this language by the British to their perceptions of identity—both theirs and of the Indians—and power: the fact of British rule over India. The British thought of Hindustani as an India-wide language, a lingua franca of the subcontinent. They also identified it with Urdu or, at least, easy Urdu, written in the Perso-Arabic (Urdu) script. These perceptions constructed a linguistic category and fed into certain identity constructions, that of the religion-based identities, going on during colonial rule. These constructions and their relationship with power and identity are traced out below.

The Term Hindustani

The term Hindustani or ‘Hindustani language’ exists in a few sources of pre-British times. For instance, Zahiruddin Babar (1483-1530), the founder of the Mughal empire, captured a chief of the Lodhi tribe who did not know Persian and ‘ordered a person well acquainted with Hindustani to interpret my words to him, one after another’ (Babar 1528: 459). Babar meant the ‘language of Hindustan’ and not necessarily a language with this name nor is it certain that this North Indian language was the ancestor of modern Urdu and Hindi. However, it is clear that a foreigner coming to Hindustan, as North India was called, found it natural to refer to the language he associated with it, the language he thought was the language of wider communication in this region, as Hindustani. The earliest European travelers, such as Edward Terry (1616-1619), uses the term ‘Indostan’ and ‘Indostan tongue’ for some widely spoken language of North India. He tells us that Thomas
Coryat (1612-1617) learned the Persian ‘and Indostan tongues’ in Agra (Foster 1921: 284). At another place he says that the ‘language of this empire, I mean the vulgar, it is called Indostan; a smooth tongue, and easy to be pronounced, which they write as wee to the right hand’ (Foster 1921: 309). Once again it is not certain that this language was the ancestor of Urdu, but there are a large number of words used even now in Urdu and Hindi interspersed throughout these accounts. Moreover, it is again clear that foreigners, trying to find a word for the common language of the people, refer to the country’s name (Hindustan).

The British seem to have done the same as their predecessors. They too referred the lingua franca of north India to the country called Hindustan. But they were powerful rulers with modern ways of spreading constructions and so the term found greater currency, at least temporarily, than ever before. Let us now look at the various definitions of ‘Hindustani’ or ‘Hindoostaneeh’ etc by the British.

Most importantly, they considered it the _lingua franca_ of India, H. T. Colebrook, an officer-scholar with much influence in India, commends the work of Gilchrist on the language of upper India calling it the language:

> Which is used in every part of Hindustan and the Dekhin; which is the common vehicle of colloquial intercourse among all well-educated natives, and among the illiterate also in many provinces of India, and which is almost everywhere intelligible to some among the inhabitants of every village (Colebrook 1808: 223).

However, although considered an all-India language in a country where the majority was Hindu, it is associated
with Muslims and is often called ‘Urdu’. Monier Williams, in his grammar, writes.

Urdu or Hindustani is the mixed and composite dialect which has resulted from the fusion of Hindi, the idiom of the Hindus, with the Persian and Arabic of the Musalman invaders. It is not only the regular spoken language of Delhi, Lucknow and at least fifty millions of persons in Central India, the North West Provinces and the Punjab, but is also the common medium of communication between Musalmans throughout all India (Williams 1871: 1).

J. B. Gilchrist, the pioneer of Hindustani studies among the British in India, differentiates it from ‘Hinduwhee’ as follows in his grammar:

The proper Hinduwee is, like European languages, the reverse of Persian, being written and read from left to right, in a character called Nagaree .... Before the Moosulmans established themselves, their letters and religion, with fire and sword in this country, the Naguree was to India, what the Roman alphabet is now to Europe (Gilchrist 1796: 4).

The British generally wrote in both the Perso-Arabic and the Devanagari Script. However, they had a mental distinction between Hindi and Hindustani. The former was associated with the Hindus; the latter with the Muslims. For the latter the terms Urdu and Rekhta are also used. The
normal understanding of this dialect is summed up by a British writer as follows:

There are two main dialects, that of the Hindus called Hindi, abounding in Sanskrit words, and that of the Muslmans called Urdu, abounding in words and phrases from the Arabic and Persian (Green 1895 Vol: 3).

Green uses the Urdu script for Mir Amman’s Bagh-o-Bahar, a text in Urdu taught to the British, but there are verses in the Devanagari script (Ibid 203) and words now associated with Hindi are used: turant, manas, jal, sundar, poot, kaniya. There are exercises in the Devanagari script but most of the work is in the Urdu one.

The term ‘Hindi’ is used both for the ancestor of modern Hindustani, Urdu as well as modern Sanskritized Hindi. It is also used for the various dialects—Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Khari Boli, Rajasthani etc—of the ‘Hindi belt’. However, the term Hindustani is mostly taken as being identical with ordinary, spoken Urdu.

Because it is associated with the Muslims, the British wrote it in the Perso-Arabic (Urdu) script. They taught it through texts like Bagh-o-Bahar. Platts draws upon other texts of Muslim cultural origin: Fasana-e-Ajaib, The Shola-e-Tur of Kanpur, the Aligarh Institute Gazette and the Urdu Reader (Platts 1920: ix). Gilchrist himself mostly uses the Urdu script and the frontispiece of his grammar has the following couplet in the same script:

Main Hazrat-e-Sauda ko suna bolte yaro
Allah hi Allah ke kya nazm o bayan hai
I heard the honorable Sauda speaking
O God! What poetry; what eloquence there was! (Gilchrist 1796: 1)
The Devanagari script was, however, taught and is used in the books on grammar. In general the passages in the Devangari script are very few.

By the time Sir George Grierson was carrying out his monumental linguistic survey of India, he made two recordings of ‘the prodigal Son’: the Urdu form (of Hindustani) read out by a Muslim called Baqir Ali; the Hindi form read out by Babu Gauri Shankar Gupta (Grierson 1885-1933). In short, the British perceptions of the distinct identities of Hindus and Muslims helped to associate language with religion, weakening the perception that a composite language could be shared between the two communities.

By the early twentieth century, both the India-wide character of Hindustani and its division into two varieties, a Muslim and Hindu one, were articles of linguistic faith. Thus Chapman, writing a textbook on Urdu for examinations, writes:

Hindustani, the lingua franca of India, is a composite language, derived from Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. It has several recognized varieties of which the principal are Urdu and Hindi (Chapman 1907: 1).

R P De, writing at about the same time, calls it the ‘lingua franca of India’ and, while recognizing the Muslim and Hindu varieties, says that both commonly go ‘under the name of Hindustani’ (R P De 1904-1). John T. Platt[s], in his grammar, calls it Urdu.

Urdu, or Hindustani, though a composite language is derived mainly from the Hindi. The Persian and Arabic languages have contributed largely, but Hindi is the chief source (Platts 1920: 1).
In short, the British considered Hindustani the *lingua franca* of the whole of India and not just north India and such centres of Urdu literature as Hyderabad (Deccan). It is arguable, however, that the number of people who understood the language outside the urban centres of north India and the Deccan was probably far fewer in 1757, the beginning of British rule, than in 1947, its end. The British perception became reality because they used it in the army, in the schools and courts of north India and brought in modernity with its improved and new means of communications: trains, cars, buses and later planes. The printing press, the radio and later the film also spread Hindustani. It spread more because of British rule than it ever had before. In short, the British first thought it was the common language of India and then actually made it almost that.

Their other perception, that it was closer to Urdu than Sanskritized Hindi, fed into the Hindi-Urdu controversy of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This, however, is a subject requiring such exclusive treatment that it has been left out here (see Rai 1984; King 1994). Suffice it to say that it was partly because of this association that identity-conscious Hindus did not adopt it as the language of the independent Indian Union opting for (Sanskritized) Hindi instead.

**Instruction and Evaluation**

The teaching was through the grammar-translation method. Evaluation was through formal examinations as well as oral performances. The latter, called Public disputations, were held at Fort William College in which subjects related to the language, or its wider significance, were discussed. The one held in 1814 was:

‘The Hindoostanee language, from its various origin and composition, is calculated to be more copious than any other language current in India’.
This was opposed and there was a moderator too.  
(Disputation 1814:17)

The questions required knowledge of both the Urdu and the Devanagari scripts and grammar as well as translation were emphasized. For instance, the Hindustani examination at Fort William held on 23 June 1801, the first such examination to be held, has the following questions among others:

1. Decline the second personal pronoun [of Hindustani].

2. Translate the following passage in Nagri and Persian scripts.

In another examination, held on the 24th of June, Mirza Ali Lutf’s ‘ghazal’ in Rekhta in the Urdu script are set up for examination (Exercises 1802). On the whole the questions tend to direct the students to study works by Muslims which are now included among the classics of Urdu. Meer Amman, of course, was a great favourite of examiners. But the list of publications of 1819 reveals far more works in Urdu, in the Urdu script, than in Hindi in the Devanagari script. For instance there is Mir Taqi Mir’s work ‘composed chiefly in the Oordoo, or Hindoostanee language’ (Roebuck 1819: 286). Then there is ‘Gul Bakaoli’ written by ‘Meer Bhadoor Ulee’ (Mir Bhadur Ali) in 1803 under the direction of Gilchrist; Sueyid Huedur Bukhsh Hueduree’s (Sayid Haider Baksh Haideri) Tota Kahani (1804); Meer Husun’s Masnavi Sahr-ul-Bayan; Ikhwan-us-Safa translated from the Arabic by Muolvee Ikram Ulee (Maulvi Ikram Ali) in 1811 (Roebuck 1819). This is in conformity with the British perception of Hindustani as easy Urdu. Sanskritized Hindi, also patronized by the British at Fort William through the works of Lalluji Lal and Sadal Misra, was probably a
reaction of the majority community (the Hindus) to this British partiality for Urdu and its script.

The institutions for teaching the British were the colleges—such as Fort William in Calcutta and Haileybury in England—but before they were established, young officers learned Hindustani from teachers (Munshis). In 1799 some junior civil servants were ordered to attend a course in Hindustani by Gilchrist. Indeed, the Court of Directors was not in favour of establishing Fort William College but it did want Gilchrist’s experimental seminary to be revived. Lord Wellesley’s reasons for establishing the college were that the East India Company ruled vast territories and its officers could ‘no longer be considered as the agents of a COMMERCIAL CONCERN; they are in fact the ministers and officers of a POWERFUL SOVEREIGN’ (Wellesley’s Minute in Council at Fort William, 18 Aug 1800 in Public 1811: 14). He goes on to argue that no establishment in England could give a correct knowledge of ‘the languages, laws, and customs of India..’ as even Sir William Jones was not intelligible to the natives of India when he first arrived at Calcutta. However, the Directors replied that their permission had not been obtained and that they were financially constrained so the college could not be allowed to function. They did, however, ask Wellesley to re-establish a seminary to teach Hindustani proposed by Gilchrist in 1798. The court proposed that:

of the languages current on the Bengal side of India, the Persian and Hindustanee are necessary for the transaction of business in all offices (Directors’ letter to ‘Our Governor-General, at Fort William in Bengal, 27 Jan 1802 in Public 1811: 61).

They believed that Bengali was necessary only for the provincial collectors (Ibid 61). All officers, and even their
wives, ‘needed the common Hindustanee, or colloquial dialect’ (Ibid 60).

Wellesley replied (5 Aug 1802) that there was no scarcity of money (the estimate of 1802-3 being 4 lacs) and if so many languages are taught in all the presidencies separately, the expenses will be more than if they are taught in one place. Hindustani, he agreed, was common to all the presidencies, but the local languages were different. As for Gilchrist, he said that he taught the grammar of Hindustani (Public 1811: 67-81) and so he was to be employed (Ibid 82). However, as Calcutta also had ‘learned natives’ already employed for teaching the language, it would be seen as ‘manifest injustice’ if they were dismissed (Ibid 107).

At last the Directors relented and professorships in languages, including ‘Hindustanee’, were established.

Languages were also taught at the Haileybury College in England. The idea was to set up a college in Herefordshire to cater for aspiring young civil servants in India:

Within the age of 18 or 19, with some instruction in the rudiments of the Oriental languages; and the Indian establishment to be confined exclusively to these languages, and particularly to act as final test, as far as languages go, of qualification for office (Malthus 1817: 43-44).

In Haileybury, Hindustani was not taught initially (1806) but on 18 December 1813, the Librarian addressed the Committee of the College concerning students who had borrowed Shakespeare’s Hindoostanee Grammar. Then a certain J. Michael requested the College (Petition of 14 Dec 1829) to buy his reprinted and amended edition of Bagh o Bahar and Ikhwan us Suffa. On 28 December 1828 C. Wilkins authorized another book of Hindustani and the same person
gave reports to the College about the proficiency of students which was not very great considering that the award of ‘Great Proficiency’ was very rare indeed. (Hertford: no pagination).

Up to 1814 there was no examination in the Oriental languages so hardly anybody took them seriously (Fisher 2004: 124). However, some of the Indian teachers had successful careers teaching Urdu. One such person, Syed Abdullah (b. 1825), reached Britain and applied for an appointment as ‘Moonshee or teacher of the Persian, Oordoo, and Hindee languages’ at Haileybury or Addiscombe (Ibid 424). He later taught for two years at Hanwell College and also at Grove, Blackheath. He is described as a ‘Teacher of Hindustanee’ (Ibid 427). Later, he became Professor of Hindustani at University College, London, and remained there from 1859 to 1866. Another gentleman, D. K. Shahabuddin, is also described as Professor of Hindustani, Gujrati and Marathi. However, the salaries of Indians were lower than those of Englishmen and they often took private tuitions (Ibid 427). Some were only private tutors. For instance, Mirza Muhammad Fitrat of Lucknow advertised himself in 1801 as a teacher of Persian, Arabic ‘and also the Hindostanee languages as pronounced in the Country’ (Fisher 2004: 105).

As Indian sailors also lived in some parts of London, those frequently coming into contact with them learnt a few words of Hindustani. Sometimes, when the sailors were taken to the police, these people turned up as interpreters (Salter 1873: 26-27).

Exactly what kind of Hindustani was learned by the English in England is not documented. However, the kind of English they learned in India, or to use in India, is documented and exemplifies the linguistic aspects of the exercise of power.
Hindustani in the Imperative Mode

The British learned Hindustani to command their subordinates in the office, servants at home and subjects all over the subcontinent. As such language was one of the sites for the exercise of power. This implied that the niceties, the polite forms and the requests were not paid enough attention when acquiring the language. This is evidenced by the exercises and conversations given in most of the books used for teaching the language. Here the English person always refers to himself (sometimes herself) as ‘hum’ (we) while the ‘native’ is generally ‘tum’ while ‘aap’ (the politest form of ‘you’) is reserved for a few very highly placed people. Moreover, the grammar is wrong and the tone is generally imperative. One of the first names for what came to be called ‘Hindustani’ used by the British in India was ‘Moors’. George Hadley, who wrote a grammar of it, explains the genesis of this name as follows:

Why the Hindooee has been called Moors, and the people Moormen, is not so easy to decide, unless from the association of that idea with every person that we see; but they have been so miscalled from the earliest intercourse with the East (Hadley 1809: xi).

This definition makes nothing clear, especially when Hadley also uses the words ‘Hindoe’ and ‘Hindostane’ for the same language. He calls the language corrupt and says it must be in order to ‘learn Persian from the Munshis’ (Ibid xi).

One peculiarity of Hadley’s list of sentences is that they are in the imperative form and very rude. The royal ‘we’ is used for one’s own self (hum) but the other person is always addressed with the less polite ‘tum’ instead of the polite ‘aap’.
Toom hum ko suntan? You (to) me hear (Hadley 1784: 107)

Chourah mooh sa bole Loud (with a broad mouth) speak.

Kone hy chorow Who’s there, boy?

Hum ghoora pur churinga We will mount the horse. (Hadley 1809: 6-15).

Not only are these orders rude but they are also grammatically incorrect. There are mistakes in use of the verb (sunte ho would be correct); adjective (ooncha not ‘Chourah mooh’, and nouns (larka or chokra not choora; ghora not ghoora).

Hadley arrived in Calcutta as a subaltern in 1763. He may have used the language in a military situation and is possibly more abrupt and imperative than others. He is not averse to using swear words (harram zaddah = bastard) (Hadley 1784: 132-133) It seems that his understanding of the language, or at least that which he wrote, was restricted to passing order[s] to servants.

In the Anglo-Hindoostanee Hand-Book (Hadley 1850), Moors is defined as ‘spoken in its purity between Europeans and their native servants in Calcutta and Bombay’ (Hadley 1850: iv). He is aware that this language, pronounced in the European way, is not useful for communicating with the higher classes.

But suppose he has to communicate with the higher classes of natives, what a despicable figure he must cut in their eyes (Ibid: iv).

He then gives a short section on salutations in which the recommended reply to all salutations for inferiors is merely ‘salam’. Even here, so little is his understanding of Indian
etiquette, that he tells English people to tell Indian visitors to cut short their visit if they stay too long. He believes that they should not offend their visitors by saying: ‘Toom Ja’o = you go!’ Instead, they should use the position formula, ‘ub rookhsut leeje = be pleased to take your leave’ (Ibid 476). He does not understand how offensive this must be for the visitors. He also points out that the ‘natives’ do not have a synonym for ‘thank you’; but that there are phrases which convey the same meaning (Ibid 479). Another writer of this period, John Shakespear, whose books are mentioned in the reading lists for students, gives exercises in Roman Urdu, the Urdu script as well as the Devanagari script giving samples of conversation between an Englishman (Sahib) and his teacher (Munshi). Here, contrary to the Indian norms of addressing one’s teacher, the Sahib always uses ‘tum’ for the Munshi while the latter uses ‘aap’ (Shakespear 1840: 29).

By the early twentieth century, when the Indians were awakening politically, there is some attempt at linguistic politeness. Thus, I.A.Shah, after giving sentences for inferiors with ‘tum’ and people of high social standing with ‘aap’ mentions that ‘it is always advisable to use “Aap”’ (Shah 1918: 78). This advice, however, was not usually followed as samples of conversation from this era suggest.

Another characteristic of the ordinary instructional books is to make Hindustani as easy as possible. This is understandable since conversation with servants and subordinates did not require the extensive vocabulary which is required for urbane or learned discourse. Thus, perhaps in order to find the lowest common denominator in vocabulary, Some British writers would dismiss all learned words. Phillott[,] the author of Hindustani Manual (1913), claims to have tested all words and phrases with an illiterate Punjabi bearer from the Murree Hills and rejected all which he did not understand (Phillott 1913: v).

Similarly, the Urdu Roznama (1911) claims:
The vocabulary of all these parts is the everyday vocabulary of the uneducated; it is believed that very few words will be found in the text that are not in some form or other used by the uneducated Muslims of Delhi, Lucknow, Behar etc. etc (Phillott 1911: 1).

At the other end, however, are learned writers like John Gilchrist whose *A Grammar of the Hindoostanee Language* (1796) quotes Urdu poets like Sauda, Wali and Meer Hasan. But whatever the extent of the knowledge of people like Gilchrist, the ordinary Englishman in India was a ‘koi Hai’ (a term used for shouting for servants meaning: ‘is anybody there?’). The caricature of an English gentleman, sometimes called ‘Colonel Poona’ as by the radio broadcaster and director, Z.A.Bukhari (Bukhari 1995: 377), in Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar represents the Indian perception of the Hindustan (Urdu) spoken by Englishmen.

Gentleman: (in Urdu) *Chiria ka ilm janta hai aap?* (Do you know the knowledge about birds?

Azad: *Ji nahin. Ye ilm yahan sikhaea nahin jate.* (No. this knowledge is not taught here).

Gentleman: *Chiria ka ilm hum khub janta hai.* (I know the knowledge about birds very well).  (Sarshar 1880: 655).

The correct form would be: *Chiria ka ilm jante hain aap?* And *chiria ka ilm hum khub jante hain.* Z. A. Bukhari, who has been mentioned above, remarks that the Hindustani spoken by English people was a testament to the listener’s will and ability to understand rather than the speaker’s proficiency in the spoken language (Bukhari 1995: 110)
Besides not conjugating the verbs correctly, the Englishmen used the imperative form either because they were taught that most often—most exercises in books used to teach Englishman to use it—or because they were careless about polite usage even when they were aware of it. An insightful observation in this context is from E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924). In the novel Mrs. Turton, the Collector’s wife invites ‘native’ women to a party.

Advancing, she shook hands with the group and said a few words of welcome in Urdu. She had learned the lingo, but only to speak to her servants, so she knew none of the politer forms, and of the verbs only the imperative mode (Forster 1924: 61-62).

**Code-Switching among Old India Hands**

Another feature of British linguistic usage in India was code switching, the use of Hindustani words in English conversation and vice versa. This is a feature of South Asians speaking English even now but the British used the typically imperative forms even on such occasions. A number of such conversations are recorded in Anglo-Indian fiction. Letters and diaries also have some Hindustani words but only those ones which, presumably, have no exact English equivalent. To begin with there are the Portuguese words (*ayah* = nurse; *cobra* = a kind of snake; *palanquin* = covered litter; *chabee* = key; *peon* = errand boy). These were absorbed in Anglo-Indian English and made it different from British English. More to the point is the use of Hindustani words in English as follows:

1. ‘This tent is curiously wrought and hath many seminars [*shamianas* = large tents] joining round about it...’
2. ‘Before this lyeth the medan [maidan=open ground] (William Hawkins in Foster 1921: 117; 134).

But, apart from using words for which there was no exact equivalent, some Anglo-Indians used Hindustani words as an identity symbol which has been referred to in the beginning of this article. The examples of this from literature are caricatures but they give some idea of how much Hindustani had permeated British speech in India.

_Decko_, you want this _admi abhi_, but you ain’t goin’ to get ‘im. _Tumhara nahin_. He’s mine, _mehra admi, sumja_? If you want to _lurro_, come on (Steel, _Voices in the Night_, 1900 in Lewis 1991: 12).

_Decko_ is _deko_= see; _admi_= man; _abhi_=just now; _tumhara_=yours; _nahin_= is not; _mehra_ is _mera_= mine; _sumja_ is _sumjhe_ = do you understand [_sumjha_ is the impolite form which does not go with _tumhara_]; _lurro_= to fight).

While this is a caricature, old India hands did use many Hindustani words which they had become accustomed to. Some did have English equivalents, though perhaps not with the same shade of meaning, while others were irreplaceable. The British contact with India left a permanent mark on the vocabulary of English, including Portuguese words used by the British in India, as the dictionaries affirm (Yule and Burnell 1881; Lewis 1991). It is because of this contact, stretching over two centuries, between India and Britain, that many English words have entered Indian languages while words of Indian languages, especially Hindustani, are found in English. This may be the most enduring legacy of this contact.
The Learning of Hindustani by British Men

The early British arrivals in India learned Hindustani privately with the help of ‘Munshis’. Later, although the ‘Munshis’ were not entirely dispensed with, educational institutions arranged for tutors. Some came in contact with the language even before leaving the British shore. This is because Hindustani was taught, as was Persian, at Haileybury. John Beames, an eminent civil servant who studied there, said ‘Haileybury was a happy place, though rather a farce as far as learning was concerned’ (Beames 1961: 63). He adds that no attempt was made ‘to practice talking them or to acquire any practical familiarity with them’ (Ibid 64). In his case, when he came to Calcutta, he had to hire a Munshi (Hari Prasad Dutt) to learn Hindustani and Persian to pass an examination. The examination was held every month and he passed in the fourth month (Beames 1961: 81). However, he did not approve of teaching young officers languages in Calcutta. According to him.

As to languages, which were the pretext for keeping us in Calcutta, I can honesty say that I knew very little more about them at the end of the eleven months than I did at the beginning (Beames 1961: 91).

He learned Punjabi by talking to a Sikh priest who simply translated books into Hindustani. This language was necessary for talking to the ‘peasantry and lower classes in town only as ‘the upper classes and educated people spoke Hindustani’ (Ibid 101).

The military cadets were also taught some Hindustani in England though perhaps only for a short time. In 1809 the Military Seminary at Adiscombe near Croydon was established. In 1804 a school was set up at Baraset near Calcutta to teach the Indian languages but it closed down in 1811. The cadets were, however, studying Hindustani—the
only Indian language they studied—in 1813. In 1861 this
c facility was sold and cadets now went to Woolwich and
Sandhurst. Among the professors of Hindustani the
following are mentioned: John Shakespear (1809-1829);
Richard Haughton (1821-1851); Charles Bowles (1829-1859);
Maj. Michael John Rowlandson (1851-1861) and Cotton
Mather (1859-1861). An Indian teacher, the equivalent of a
‘Munshi’, Hasan Ali, was also employed between 1810-1816.
The cadets were even less willing pupils than the civil
servants. Thus they must have turned up in India with
almost no knowledge of Hindustani.

The military officers were, however, examined in
Hindustani so they had to learn it somehow. Lieutenant
Bruce Hay writes to his father from Landi Kotal:

The Quartermaster’s clerk of the 9th
Gurkhas is teaching me Urdu now. I’ve had
him about a week so far and hope to go up
for the lower standard the next exam in
Peshawar—the beginning of October (Hay
19 July 1898)

He gives details of the course and how the officers
approached their language learning exercise.

I’ve had an awful blow! In the Bagh-
o-Bahar, which is the book (part) we have to
do for the Urdu Lower Standard, I found
out about four days ago I had been doing
entirely the wrong show—having trusted
the Munshi—and now, if I want to get the
other beastly part finished I shall be have to
neglect “Urzis” and conversation, so that
you probably won’t see my name amongst
the successful ones! (Hay 6 September
1898).
This particular officer says he did 4 to 5 hours daily of Urdu and that in the examination, conducted by his former captain, he got ‘good’ for conversation, ‘good’ for ‘Urzi’[letter writing], ‘tolerable’ for Bagh-o-Bahar which was ‘very hard’ (4 October 1898). Even so, he failed ‘in that beastly Urdu Exam, and was a bit sick’ when he heard that. But he tells his father by way of mitigation that only ‘seven fellows in whole of the Punjab passed, six of whom are on the staff!’ (22 November 1898). This suggests that the standards were stringent but, in fact, most of British officers never passed beyond the rudimentary stage of giving orders with the verbs in the imperative mode and understanding the simplest of conversations.

Learning of Hindustani by British Women

English Women also had to learn Hindustani. The most eminent example is that of Queen Victoria herself who, in keeping with her status of being the Empress of India, learned basic Hindustani from an Indian teacher, Munshi Abdul Karim (1863-1909) who was sent to her as a ‘gift’ and rose from the position of a waiter to that of teacher (Munshi), and who was also her favourite and eventually acquired the title of her Indian Secretary (Anand 1996). Among the first descriptions of the Queen’s diaries which are exercise books having simple sentences of Hindustani, written in the Urdu script, are by Rafiuddin Ahmad, a contemporary who knew Munshi Abdul Karim (Ahmad 1892). Fanny Parkes, who lived in India between 1822 to 1846, was the wife of a minor civil servant. She enjoyed traveling all over India and was sympathetic to Indians. While coming to India she writes on October 11, 1822.

Monsieur mon mari, who was studying Persian, began to teach me Hindustani,
which afforded me much pleasure (Parkes 1850: 7).

While the husband (Monsieur Mon Mari) does not seem to have made any remarkable progress in any language, Fanny learnt Urdu very well. To begin with, she had to learn the language purely for instrumental reasons which she describes as follows:

It appeared curious to be surrounded by servants who, with the exception of the tailor, could not speak one word of English; and I was forced to learn to speak Hindustani (Parkes 1850: 16).

Later, as she mingled more and more with Indians, she found the language an asset to participate in the aesthetic experiences India had to offer. Thus she mentions a gathering of Europeans—possibly the last remnants of the ‘White Mughals’ (Darlymple 2003) who were watching a dance (‘nach’) and listening to music in Hindustani. Despite considerable fluency, her grammar is as wrong as other English people. For instance, she sends a seal with the following motto on it:

Toom ghee ka dhye jalao (i.e. be happy and celebrate) (Ibid 47).

Actually it should be:
Tum ghee ke diye jalao

Hindustani was so widespread that Fanny Parkes reports its being used by the Marhattas. They listend, and played, Hindustani ‘airs on the sitar’ (Parkes 1850: 262). Parkes himself is proficient enough in idiomatic Hindustani
to use a proverb to reconcile the Rani of Gwalior to expulsion from her former state:

I hesitated; the Bāī looked at me for an answer. Dropping the eyes of perplexity on the folded hands of despondency, I replied ‘He who has the stick, his is the buffalo’! The effect was electric. The Bāīza Bāī and the Gaja Rājā laughed, and I believe the odd and absurd application of the proverb half reconciled the Maharani to her fate (Parkes 1850: 265).

She was the interpreter of the Miss Edens with the former Marhatta rulers (Ibid 203). And, indeed, the Rani of Gwalior, Her Highness the Baiza Bai, wrote a letter (Kharita) to Fanny Parkes on 29 June 1838. She describes it as follow:

The letter was written in Urdu (the court language), in the Persian character, by one of Her Highness’s moonshees, and signed by the Bāī herself: the paper is adorned with gold devices. (Ibid, 328).

It is significant that Fanny calls it Urdu, not Hindustani, and that this language is used by a Marhatta princely house.

A contemporary, Isabella Fane, daughter of General Sir Henry Fane, C-in-C of the Indian Army between 1835-1838 learned Hindustani but was ‘too imperfect in the language to go beyond asking for what we want, and as for understanding what they say, it is quite out of the question (Pemble 1985: 71). Like the men she also shouts for attendants with ‘qui hi!’ (Koi Hai) (Pemble 1985: 102). Her Hindustani, like many other women’s, never went beyond the imperative mode of E.M.Forster’s character, Mrs Turton.
The Learning of Hindustani by British Children

Hindustani remained important as the British *lingua franca* as far as communication with Indians, especially uneducated ones, was concerned till the end of British rule. The children of the officers acquired it as their memoirs testify. The children learned the language through the servants. And sometimes became as fluent in it as to use it as a mother-tongue or first language.

Gillian Owen, whose father arrived in India, in 1918, says:

> My parents were vague, unimportant, rarely seen and vaguely threatening, figures who could not speak my language—for I remember consciously translating into English when I was with them (Fleming Vol 2, 2004: 39).

This must have been exceptional. However, most children were fluent and flexible—i.e. they could switch between languages with ease though, as was common in British India, they spoke incorrect Hindustani in the imperative tone: Blake Pinnell, whose father arrived in India in 1920, reports:

> Martin and I talked in Hindustani to the Indian servants and probably spoke as much in that language as we did in English. No one gave us lessons in Hindustani. I suppose we learned it by listening. Whether what we said was strictly grammatical, I shall never know, but at least we communicated effectively. Later on, we learned that there was a brand of Hindustani known as ‘kitchen Hindi’ which the *memsahib* or the lady of the house used
when speaking to her servants, and maybe we had picked up a bit of that (Ibid Vol 1: 247).

Indeed, almost all British India picked up a bit if the ‘Kitchen Hindi’ if the phrase lists, dialogues, exercises and sentences quoted in the documents the British have left behind are any indicator.

However, some people did know the other varieties and styles. Michael Bruce (b. 1927) in North Bihar, says his father, a police officer, knew Hindi and Urdu and at three levels: the cultured, the everyday and the bazaar. He could use facetious stories in the bazaar style to dispense a potentially violent crowd (Fleming Vol 1, 2004: 240).

Out of all the accounts of the British children, there is only one in which the child did not learn Hindustani very well. Ann Marindin, reports:

Our servants (Ayub-Emmy and Latif-bearer) wrote and spoke English, as well as many other Indian languages, so unlike many of my contemporaries I failed to speak Hindi fluently (Fleming Vol 2: 178).

Some of these children are alive today and the nostalgia of the raj, expressed through words of Hindustani to those who understand the language, is very much part of their being as it was of their ancestors, the Anglo-Indians who remembered India, and their own youth and importance, with the Hindustani words of their time in India.

**Hindustani in the Roman Script**

Hindustani in the Roman Script was primarily for the use of the Christian missionaries and the army. There are several versions of the Bible in this script. The language is easy but is more close to Urdu than Modern Hindi (Bible
1860). In addition to the scriptures, there were religious hymns to be accompanied with music in the Roman script. The following is an example of such a tune set to the piano. The words are:

\[
Yá Rabb terí janabmen hargiz kami na-hín \\
Tu jh sá jahan ke \\
Bích to ko-í ga-ní nahin.
\]

(Parsons 1875)

Although British officers were divided over patronizing missionaries, some being of the view that the state must not appear to interfere with the natives’ religions, some Evangelical Christians did entertain the hope that the dissemination of the Bible in Hindustani would spread Christianity in the Orient. The Reverend Claudius writing in 1805, expresses happiness that Fort William College would help in the translation of the Bible (Pearce Vol 2, 1846: 294). A certain Mr. Bachanan, writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury in the same year, exults that in ‘the centre of the Pagan world, and at the chief seat of superstition and adulatory’this work of translation is going on and ‘the unconverted natives assist in the translation’ (Ibid 296). And Wilberforce, writing in 1813, considered ‘the translation and diffusion of the scriptures’ the ‘most powerful agents in the great work of Christianizing the natives of India’ (Ibid 299).

However, administrators often prevented the more zealous proselytizers from teaching the scriptures in schools. A certain Reverend Jabez Carey, for instance, had introduced them as school books in Rajputana. However, a letter from Fort William to the Resident, Major General Sir David Ochterlony, stopped the experiment and suggested Carey should be given ‘suitable Books in Persian and Hindoostany languages from Serampore and from the Calcutta Book Society’ instead (Fort William 1822 in Sinha and Dasgupta 1964: 257).
In any case, because the scriptures were available in the Roman script, they were read by many Christians—especially in Kashmir, Punjab and the Hindi belt—who whose mother tongue was not Urdu and who could not even read its script. It was one of the factors which helped spread the kind of Hindustani which is close to Urdu and Hindi as used on the streets of Pakistani and North Indian cities. As for the Army, among others, Frank Lugard Brayne (1882-1952) Adviser on Indian Affairs, Indian Army (1941-46), says:

Armies must have a common language and the Indian Army uses Urdu for all enlisted men whatever their home language.

He advocates the use of the Roman script but Indian, and not British, pronunciation of Urdu.

Yet another letter tells us that Urdu, sometimes also called Hindustani in the same papers, written in the Roman script had been in use in the Army since 1914 i.e. World War I. Indeed, it was supposed to be the lingua franca of the Army. However, the way Roman Urdu was written was not accurate. Brigadier F.L. Brayne was the moving spirit behind introducing the new changes. He first conceded that there were imperfections and then suggested changes.

Roman Urdu used by the Army is only 65% accurate. By a few small changes it could be made 99% accurate, and still could be typed and printed without any alterations or additions to the type fonts and typewriters.

These changes were circulated both to military and civilian officers (Brayne NO. 100677/WD. (Advsr). He wanted the army to adopt them and felt that the civilian bureaucracy would follow:
On 24 Oct 1945 he says.

The Army should go its own way, as it has hitherto. If the revised system is good enough the civil will begin to nibble [Brayne 1945. No. 100672/WG (Advsr/.Z)].

Roman Urdu was used in the Pakistan Army, and is still used, for conveying the orders of the officers to the Non-Commissioned officers.

Urdu in the Roman script must have been useful in disseminating the knowledge of the language, or at least the easy version of it sometimes called Hindustani, to people who could not read the Urdu or the Devanagari scripts. It is now used in the internet to write e-mail messages in Hindi and Urdu. Moreover, a number of personal writings on the internet (blogs) are in this script. A number of erotic, and frankly pornographic, stories purporting to be real life events are also available on the internet (see Hindi erotica on google).

**Conclusion**

Hindustani was the name the British gave to Urdu in India. They imagined it as an India-wide language; a *lingua franca* which it probably was not before their arrival. They spread it all over the country by using it in the army, to talk to servants and subordinates. They also spread it wide by using it in the courts of law, the lower levels of administration and teaching it formally in schools all over north India. Moreover, they wrote primers, phrase books, dictionaries and grammars in it thus making it the most commonly known Indian language in their Indian empire. In short, the imagination, or perception, that it was the language of their Indian empire came first and the reality followed because of the fact that the language was used as if it already was the language of the widest possible
communication in the country. The fact that it was the language of wider communication in North India during the 18th century is probably correct but it did not have as much spread nor was it used in so many formal and informal domains all over India as it was because of the British understanding of it as the lingua franca of India. The second aspect of the British understanding of Hindustani is that they equated with Urdu and favoured the Perso-Arabic script for writing it. They did not favour the highly Persianized variety of it but, on the whole, their Hindustani was closer to easy, or commonly spoken, Urdu than it was to either the vernaculars of the Hindi belt or Sanskritized Hindi. This particular understanding was felt to favour Muslims, as Urdu was associated with Muslims, by Hindu nationalists who later opted for Hindi instead of Hindustani despite the widespread intelligibility of the latter. Though the British were the first rulers who made such efforts to learn Hindustani and produced so much instructional material in it, they used it from a position of power and, hence, neglected its polite usages and also did not master its grammar fully. This creative an imperative style of Hindustani which goes with the tone of command the British employed in most of their dealings with ordinary Indians. Hindustani influenced English and its words have entered the lexicon of English. This is the enduring fruit of the two-century long contact of the British with India.
Note

1. Queen Victoria’s diaries are preserved in the Royal Archives of Windsor. I am indebted to Professor Naeem Qureshi, former professor of History at the Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, for showing me a photograph of a page of the Queen’s writing. Suahila Anand also has the facsimile of one page of the diary in her book (Anand 1996).

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